VINCULIS

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IN VINCULIS.



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BY

WILFRID SCAWEN BLUNT,

AUTHOR OF "THE WIND AND THE WHIRLWIND,"
"THE LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS,"
ETC., ETC.

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DEDICATION.

TO THE

PRIESTS AND PEASANTRY OF IRELAND,

WHO FOR

THREE HUNDRED YEARS

HAVE PRESERVED THE TRADITION OF A

RIGHTEOUS WAR

FOR

FAITH AND FREEDOM.

PREFACE.

In dedicating these poems to the priests and peasantry of Ireland, their author desires to acknowledge his deep gratitude towards them, not for their sympathy only, and this was great, but for much else which, though difficult to express, will be divined in their perusal.

The earliest of the pieces, those headed "In Vinculis," were with a few exceptions actually written (on the fly-leaves of the Author's prayer-book) in Galway and Kilmainham gaols. The rest were either designed in prison or composed in connection with the events of the time. They record an episode in the writer's life to which, in spite of many austerities and some real suffering, he cannot look back otherwise than with affection. Imprisonment is a reality of discipline most useful

to the modern soul, lapped as it is in physical sloth and self-indulgence. Like a sickness or a spiritual retreat it purifies and ennobles; and the soul emerges from it stronger and more self-contained. Alas, that these influences should so soon lose their power!—And yet, fall as we may from the higher level, they do not wholly perish, but remain for us a wholesome recollection and a standard of all that we can imagine best for this life and another.

W. S. B.

Crabbet Park, Sussex,
Oct. 23, 1888.

CONTENTS.

"IN VINCULIS."

SONNETS

WRITTEN IN PRISON.

I.

From Caiaphas to Pilate I was sent,
  Who judged with unwashed hands a crime to me.
  Next came the sentence, and the soldiery
Claimed me their prey. Without, the people rent
With weeping voices the loud firmament.
  And through the night from town to town passed we
  'Mid shouts and drums and stones hurled heavily
By angry crowds on love and murder bent.

And last the gaol—what stillness in these doors!
  The silent turnkeys their last bolts have shot,
And their steps die in the long corridors.
  I am alone. My tears run fast and hot.
Dear Lord, for Thy grief's sake I kiss these floors
  Kneeling—then turn to sleep, dreams trouble not.

———

II.

Naked I came into the world of pleasure,
  And naked come I to this house of pain.
Here at the gate I lay down my life's treasure,
  My pride, my garments and my name with men.
  The world and I henceforth shall be as twain,
No sound of me shall pierce for good or ill
  These walls of grief. Nor shall I hear the vain
Laughter and tears of those who love me still.

Within, what new life waits me! Little ease,
  Cold lying, hunger, nights of wakefulness,
Harsh orders given, no voice to soothe or please,
  Poor thieves for friends, for books rules meaning-
      less;
This is the grave—nay, hell. Yet, Lord of Might,
Still in Thy light my spirit shall see light.

III.

Honoured I lived erewhile with honoured men
  In opulent state. My table nightly spread
Found guests of worth, peer, priest and citizen,
  And poet crowned, and beauty garlanded.
  Nor these alone, for hunger too I fed,
And many a lean tramp and sad Magdalen
  Passed from my doors less hard for sake of bread.
Whom grudged I ever purse or hand or pen?

To-night, unwelcomed at these gates of woe
  I stand with churls, and there is none to greet
My weariness with smile or courtly show
  Nor, though I hunger long, to bring me meat.
God! what a little accident of gold
Fences our weakness from the wolves of old!

IV.

How shall I build my Temple to the Lord,
  Unworthy I, who am thus foul of heart?
How shall I worship who no traitor word
  Know but of love to play a suppliant's part?
  How shall I pray, whose soul is as a mart
For thoughts unclean, whose tongue is as a sword
  Even for those it loves to wound and smart?
Behold how little I can help Thee, Lord.

The Temple I would build should all be white,
  Each stone the record of a blameless day;
The souls that entered there should walk in light,
  Clothed in high chastity and wisely gay.
Lord, here is darkness—yet this heart unwise,
Bruised in Thy service, take in sacrifice.

V.

A prison is a convent without God—
  Poverty, Chastity, Obedience
Its precepts are. In this austere abode
  None gather wealth of pleasure or of pence.
  Woman's light wit, the heart's concupiscence
Are banished here. At the least warder's nod
  Thy neck shall bend in mute subservience,
Nor yet for virtue—rather for the rod.

Here a base turnkey novice-master is,
  Teaching humility. The matin bell
    Calls thee to toil, but little comforteth.
None heed thy prayers or give the kiss of peace.
  Nathless, my soul, be valiant. Even in Hell
    Wisdom shall preach to thee of life and death.

VI.

There are two voices with me in the night,
Easing my grief. The God of Israel saith,
"I am the Lord thy God which vanquisheth.
"See that thou walk unswerving in my sight,
"So shall thy enemies thy footstool be.
"I will avenge." Then wake I suddenly,
And as a man new armoured for the fight,
I shout aloud against my enemy.

Anon, another speaks, a voice of care
With sorrow laden and akin to grief,
"My son," it saith, "What is my will with thee?
"The burden of my sorrows thou shalt share.
"With thieves thou too shalt be accounted thief,
"And in my kingdom thou shalt sup with me."

VII.

Long have I searched the earth for liberty,
  In desert places and lands far abroad,
Where neither kings nor constables should be,
  Nor any law of Man, alas, or God.
  Freedom, Equality and Brotherhood,
These were my quarries, which eternally
  Fled from my footsteps fast as I pursued,
Sad phantoms of desire by land and sea.

See, it is ended. Sick and overborne
  By foes and fools, and my long chase, I lie—
Here, in these walls, with all life's souls forlorn
  Herded I wait,—and in my ears the cry,
"Alas, poor brothers, equal in Man's scorn,
  "And free in God's good liberty to die."

VIII.

'Tis time, my soul, thou should'st be purged of pride.
What men are these with thee, whose ill deeds done
Make thee thus shrink from them and be denied?
They are but as thou art, each mother's son
A convict in transgression—Here is one,
Sayest thou, who struck his fellow and he died.
And yet he weeps hot tears. Do thy tears run?
This other thieved, yet clasps Christ crucified.

Where is thy greater virtue? Thinkest thou sin
Is but crime's record on the judgment seat?
Or must thou wait for death to be bowed down?
Oh for a righteous reading which should join
Thy deeds together in an accusing sheet,
And leave thee if thou could'st, to face men's frown!

———

IX.

Behold the Court of Penance. Four gaunt walls
Shutting out all things but the upper heaven.
Stone flags for floor, where daily from their stalls
The human cattle in a circle driven
Tread down their pathway to a mire uneven,
Pale-faced, sad-eyed, and mute as funerals.
Woe to the wretch whose weakness unforgiven
Falters a moment in the track or falls.

Yet is there consolation. Overhead
The pigeons build and the loud jackdaws talk,
And once in the wind's eye, like a ship moored,
A sea-gull flew and I was comforted.
Even here the heavens declare thy glory, Lord,
And the free firmament thy handiwork.

X.

My prison has its pleasures. Every day
  At breakfast-time, spare meal of milk and bread,
Sparrows come trooping in familiar way
  With head aside beseeching to be fed.
  A spider too for me has spun her thread
Across the prison rules, and a brave mouse
  Watches in sympathy the warders' tread,
These two my fellow-prisoners in the house.

But about dusk in the rooms opposite
  I see lamps lighted, and upon the blind
A shadow passes all the evening through.
  It is the gaoler's daughter fair and kind
And full of pity—so I image it—
Till the stars rise, and night begins anew.

XI.

God knows, 'twas not with a fore-reasoned plan
  I left the easeful dwellings of my peace,
And sought this combat with ungodly Man,
  And ceaseless still through years that do not cease
  Have warred with Powers and Principalities.
My natural soul, ere yet these strifes began,
  Was as a sister diligent to please
And loving all, and most the human clan.

God knows it. And He knows how the world's tears
  Touched me. And He is witness of my wrath,
How it was kindled against murderers
  Who slew for gold, and how upon their path
I met them. Since which day the World in arms
Strikes at my life with angers and alarms.

XII.

There are wrongs done in the fair face of heaven
  Which cry aloud for vengeance, and shall cry;
Loves beautiful in strength whose wit has striven
  Vainly with loss and man's inconstancy;
  Dead children's faces watched by souls that die;
Pure streams defiled; fair forests idly riven;
  A nation, suppliant in its agony,
Calling on justice, and no help is given.

All these are pitiful. Yet, after tears,
  Come rest and sleep and calm forgetfulness,
And God's good providence consoles the years.
  Only the coward heart which did not guess,
The dreamer of brave deeds that might have been,
Shall cureless ache with wounds for ever green.

XIII.

To do some little good before I die ;
To wake some echoes to a loftier theme ;
To spend my life's last store of industry
On thoughts less vain than Youth's discordant dream ;
To endow the world's grief with some counter-scheme
Of logical hope which through all time should lighten
The burden of men's sorrow and redeem
Their faces' paleness from the tears that whiten ;

To take my place in the world's brotherhood
As one prepared to suffer all its fate ;
To do and be undone for sake of good,
And conquer rage by giving love for hate ;
That were a noble dream, and so to cease,
Scorned by the proud but with the poor at peace.

XIV.

I thought to do a deed of chivalry,
  An act of worth, which haply in her sight
Who was my mistress should recorded be
  And of the nations. And, when thus the fight
  Faltered and men once bold with faces white
Turned this and that way in excuse to flee,
  I only stood, and by the foeman's might
Was overborne and mangled cruelly.

Then crawled I to her feet, in whose dear cause
  I made this venture, and "behold," I said,
"How I am wounded for thee in these wars."
  But she, "Poor cripple, would'st thou I should wed
A limbless trunk?" and laughing turned from me,
Yet was she fair, and her name "Liberty."

XV.

Farewell, dark gaol. You hold some better hearts
  Than in this savage world I thought to find.
I do not love you nor the fraudulent arts
  By which men tutor men to ways unkind.
  Your law is not my law, and yet my mind
Remains your debtor. It has learned to see
  How dark a thing the earth would be and blind
But for the light of human charity.

I am your debtor thus and for the pang
  Which touched and chastened, and the nights of
        thought
Which were my years of learning. See I hang
  Your image here, a glory all unsought,
About my neck. Thus saints in symbol hold
Their tools of death and darings manifold.

XVI.

No, I will smile no more. If but for pride
And the high record of these days of pain,
I will not be as these, the uncrucified
Who idly live and find life's pleasures vain.
The garment of my life is rent in twain,
Parted by love and pity. Some have died
Of a less hurt than 'twas my luck to gain,
And live with God, nor dare I be denied.

No, I will smile no more. Love's touch of pleasure
Shall be as tears to me, fair words as gall,
The sun as blackness, friends as a false measure,
And Spring's blithe pageant on this earthly ball,
If it should brag, shall earn from me no praise,
But silence only to my end of days.

REMEMBER O'BRIEN!

SONG FOR THE AUTUMN OF 1887.

I.

Ireland, wake! your son lies bleeding,
  Stricken through his love for you.
Wake! arise! and let your pleading
  Wrap your shores in grief anew.
    Scatter ashes on your head,
    Ireland, for your living dead;
Fire the beacon, fan the ember
Of your lost wrath, and remember
  All the wrong of Clan-na-Gael,
  And the man who lies in jail.
    Wake! Remember O'Brien!

II.

On his plank bed in the darkness,
  He is laid who gave you light,

Crisped with cold and prison starkness
  Is the hand your woes did write.
    Dumb the lips are that your cause
    Pleaded against human laws.
Here as on a bed of passion
Lies the martyr of your nation,
  All his eloquence grown mute.
  Ireland ! be your wrath afoot,
    Rise ! Remember O'Brien !

III.

Be not idle in your daring ;
  He nor idleness nor ease
Knew for you whose whole life's bearing
  Told contempt for things that please.
    What was pleasure to his heart ?
    In your griefs to bear a part.
What his mirth ? To cheat your laughter
Of the tears Earth hungers after

With a word of wit or play.
Which of you dares laugh to-day?
Nay! Remember O'Brien!

IV.

Ireland! plead before high heaven
For your saint upon his cross.
His the gain of wrongs forgiven,
Yours the pain is and the loss.
Prayers he hardly needs for sin
Who was blameless most of men;
But for your own selfish meekness
Plead with heaven to nerve your weakness
For his sake and your right arm,
With the power of dealing harm.
Strike! Remember O'Brien!

V.

Wave your banners, march in chorus,
Loud with passion, fierce with pain.

Let your trumpets ring sonorous
  With the tramp of angry men.
    Meet your judges face to face
    In each street and market place ;
There to read in stern derision
Of their laws your high commission.
  Ay, proclaim them, as is meet,
  Outlaws at God's mercy seat.
    Shout ! Remember O'Brien !

VI.

Bind them to a new transaction
  For the man who with them lies ;
Their's was argument in action,
  Action, too, be your replies.
    They have willed it. Let there be
    One campaign from sea to sea.
Lock your rents in your own coffers
And compel them to your offers.

Stand out stiffly and unbent ;
Look ! each hedge lends argument.
Say, " Remember O'Brien !"

VII.

Patriots, rise ! take rank together,
Fight for God and fight for man ;
In the stormy autumn weather
Strike for freedom and the Plan.
He it was who taught you this,
Here your stoutest vengeance is.
Blackthorn blows for hours of trial,
And on gale day stern denial ;
Till your gaolers on their knees
Sign the order of release,
And kneel to William O'Brien.

POOR ERIN.

SONG FOR 1888.

I.

Oh poor Erin ! Alas poor Erin !
 Where is the land with a fate like yours,
Blessed with a beauty to all endearing,
 Cursed with a sorrow no fortune cures ?

II.

Oh poor Erin ! Alas poor Erin !
 What is the cause of your long distress ?
The hope of freedom forever nearing,
 Forever fading to less and less.

III.

Oh poor Erin ! Alas poor Erin !
 What have you done that men hate you so ?

You have clung to your God while the rest despairing
Bowed their souls in the house of woe.

IV.

Oh poor Erin! Alas poor Erin!
Which are the traitors that brought you blame?
The hireling shepherds that did your shearing
And sold your sheep to the land of shame.

V.

Oh poor Erin! Alas poor Erin!
Which of your sons shall have served you best?
The men that died for your sake unfearing
In prison fetters as felons dressed.

VI.

Oh poor Erin! Poor faithful Erin!
When shall the day of your grief be past?
When the mighty ocean shall bring you steering
To reap your bread on the waters cast.

VII.

Oh poor Erin! No more poor Erin!
The hope in your bosom is green to-day,
The voice of the nations around you cheering,
Tells that your trouble is past away.

VIII.

Oh poor Erin! All hail to Erin!
Revenge was sweet, but true love endures.
Behold your foeman in anguish rearing
A home of freedom forever yours.

THE CANON OF AUGHRIM.

I.

You ask me of English honour, whether your Nation is just?
Justice for us is a word divine, a name we revere—
Alas, no more than a name, a thing laid by in the dust.
The world shall know it again, but not in this month or year.

II.

Honour? Oh no, you profane it. Justice? What words! What deeds!
Look at the suppliant Earth with its living burden of men.

Here and to Hindostan the nations and kings and
creeds
Praise your name as a god's, the god of their
children slain.

III.

Which of us doubts your justice? It is not here
in the West,
After six hundred years of pitiless legal war,
The sons of our soil are in doubt. They know,
who have borne it, best.
The world is famished for justice. You give us
a stone, your law.

IV.

These are its fruits. Yet, think you, the Ireland
where men weep
Once was a jubilant land and dear to the Saints
of God.
All you have made it to-day is a hell to conquer
and keep,
Yours by the right of the strongest hand, the
right of the rod.

V.

History tells the story in signs deep writ on the soil,
Plain and clear in indelible type both for fools and wise.
Here is no need of books, of any expositor's coil.
He who runs may read, and he may weep who has eyes.

* * * * *

VI.

This is the plain of Aughrim, renowned in our Irish story
Because of the blood that was shed, the last in arms by our sons,
A fight in battle array, with more of grief than of glory,
Where as a Nation we died to dirge of your English guns.

VII.

So the Chroniclers tell us, and turn in silence their page,
Ending the fighting here. I tell you the Chroniclers lie.
Spite of the hush of the dead, the battle from age to age
Flames on still through the land, and still at men's hands men die.

* * * * *

VIII.

Look! I will show you the footsteps of those who have died at your hand,
Done to death by your law, alas, and not by the sword,
Only their work remaining, a nation's track in the sand,
Ridge and furrow of ancient fields half hid in the sward.

IX.

Step by step they retreated. You fenced them out with your Pale,
Back from township and city and cornland fair by the Sea.
Waterford, Youghal and Wexford you took, and the Golden Vale.
Tears were their portion assigned,—for you their demesnes in fee.

X.

Back to the forest and bog. They shouldered their spades like men,
Fought with the wolf and the rock and the hunger which holds the hill.
Still new homesteads arose where fever lurked in the fen,
Still your law was a sword that hunted and dogged them still.

XI.

Magistrate, landlord, bailiff, process-server and
spy,
These were the dogs of your pack, which scented
the land's increase.
Vainly, like hares, they lay in the forms they had
fashioned to die.
Justice hunted them forth by the hand of the
Justice of Peace.

* * * * *

XII.

Look at it closer, thus, and shading your eyes
with your hand,
Far as a bird could reach, to the utmost edge of
the plain,
What do you see but grass ! and what do you
understand ?
Cattle that graze on the grass.—Alas, you have
looked in vain.

XIII.

See with my eyes. They are older than yours, but
more keen in their love.
See what I saw as a boy in the fields, as a priest
by the ways,
See what I saw in anger with angels watching
above
Hiding their faces for shame in the day of the
terrible days.

XIV.

Horsemen and footmen and guns. They were
here. I have seen them, though some
Say that two hundred years have passed since
the battle was stilled.
Ay, and the cry of the wounded, drowned by the
beat of the drum,
Did I not hear with my ears how it rose like the
wail of a child?

XV.

I was a student then, a boy, in the days now forgotten,
When for our school-house the chapel must serve, for our master the priest ;
Many a Latin theme have I scrawled on the altar-rails rotten,
Thinking no more of the house of God than the house of the least.

XVI.

Yet we were saints in Aughrim. An Eden the plain then stood,
Covered with gardens round, a happy and holy place,
Rich in the generations of those who had shed their blood,
Bound to their faith by the martyr's bond and the power of grace.

XVII.

They do us wrong who affirm the Irish people are sad.
Sad we are in the lands afar, but not in our home.
Oh, if you knew the gladness with which our people are glad,
Well might you grieve for your own, the poor in your towns of doom.

XVIII.

Here, God knows it, we hunger. But hunger, a little, is well;
Man with full stomach is proud, his heart is shut to the poor.
Well, too, is persecution, since thus through its sting we rebel,
Clinging yet more to our love and our hate in the homes we adore.

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XIX.

Mine is a mission of peace, to save men's souls in the world,
Not to make converts to Hell, for Ireland's sake even, you say.
Why should I preach of rebellion, and hatred, words impotent hurled
Each like a spear from the lips to strike whom it lists in the fray?

XX.

Hark. You shall hear it. This parish was mine. I remember it all
Tilled in squares, like a chess-board, each house and holding apart.
Down where the nettles grow you may mark the line of the wall
Bounding the chapel field where our dead lie heart on heart.

XXI.

It was not the famine killed them. God knows in
that evil year
He pressed us a little hard, but he spared us our
lives and joy.
Only the old and weak were taken. The rest stood
clear,
Quit of their debt to Death. God struck, but
not to destroy.

XXII.

The wolves of the world were fiercer. The wolves
of the world to-day
Go in sheep's clothing all, with names that the
world applauds.
Nobody now draws sword or spear with intent to
slay.
Death is done with a sigh, and mercy tightens
the cords.

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XXIII.

It was a woman did it. Her father, the lawyer
Blake,
Purchased the land for a song,—some say, or
less, for a debt
Owed by the former lord, a broken spendthrift
and rake—
And left it hers when he died with all he could
grip or get.

XXIV.

Timothy Blake was not loved. He had too much
in his heart
Of the law of tenures, for love. No word men
spoke in his praise.
Yet, in his lawyer's way, and deeds and titles apart,
All were allowed to live who paid their rent in
his days.

XXV.

Little Miss Blake was his daughter. A pink-faced
school-girl she came
First from Dublin city to live in her father's
house,
She and her dogs and horses, unconscious of shame
or blame.
Who would have guessed her cruel with manners
meek as a mouse?

XXVI.

Nothing in truth was further, or further seemed
from her heart,
Set as it was on pleasure and undisturbed with
pain,—
So she might ride with the hounds when winter
brought round its sport,
Or angle a trout from the river—than war with
her fellow men.

XXVII.

She was fastidious, too, with her English education,
And pained at want and squalor, things hard she should understand.
The sight of poverty touched the sense of what was due to her station,
And still in her earlier years she gave with an open hand.

XXVIII.

The village was poor to look at, a row of houses, no more,
With just four walls and the thatch in holes where the fowls passed through.
A shame to us all, she averred, and her, so near to her door,
She sent us for slates to the quarry and bade us build them anew.

XXIX.

The Chapel, too, was unsightly. A Protestant she, and yet
Decency needs must be in a house of prayer, she said.
Perched on a rising ground in sight of her windows set,
Its shapeless walls were her grief. She built it a new façade.

* * * * *

XXX.

What was it changed her heart? God knows. I know not. Some say
She set her fancy on one above her in rank and pride.
Young Lord Clair at the Castle had danced with her. Then one day
Dancing and she were at odds. He had taken an English bride.

XXXI.

This, or it may be less,—a foolish word from a friend—
A jest repeated to ears already wounded and sore,
A pang of jealousy roused for the sake of some private end,
Or only the greed of gain, of more begotten of more.

XXXII.

These were the days of plenty, of prices rising, men thought
Still to rise for ever, and all were eager to buy.
Landlord with landlord vied, and tenant with tenant bought.
Riches make selfish souls, and gain has an evil eye.

XXXIII.

Oh! the economist fraud, with wealth of nations for text,
How has it robbed the poor of their one poor right to live!
Only the fields grow fat. The men that delve them are vexed,
Scourged with the horse-leech cry of the daughter of hunger, "give."

XXXIV.

Why should I blame this woman? She practised what all men preach,
Duty to Man a little, but much to herself and land.
She made two blades of grass to grow in the place of each;
She took two guineas for one. What more would your laws demand?

XXXV.

If in her way men died, Economy's rules are stern,
Stern as the floods and droughts, the tempests and fires and seas.
Men but cumber the land whose labour is weak to earn
More than their board and bed; much cattle were worthy these.

XXXVI.

So those argued who served her. What wonder if she too grew
Hard in her dealings around, and grudged their lands to the poor?
Cary, her agent, died. The day she engaged the new,
Grief stepped into the village, and Death sat down at the door.

* * * * *

XXXVII.

Rent. Who speaks of the rent? We Irish, who till the soil,
Are ever ready to pay the tribute your laws impose;
You, the conquering race, have portioned to each his toil,
We, the conquered, bring the ransom due to our woes.

XXXVIII.

Here is no case of justice, of just debts made or unjust;
Contracts 'twixt freemen are, not here, where but one is free.
No man argues of right, who pays the toll that he must;
Life is dear to all, and rent is the leave to be.

XXXIX.

No. None argued of rent. Each paid, or he could not pay,
Much as the seasons willed, in fatness or hungry years.
Blake's old rental was high. She raised it, and none said nay;
Then she raised it again, and made a claim for arrears.

XL.

Joyce was her agent now. The rules of Charity bind
Somewhat my tongue in speech, for even truths wrongs endured;
All I will say is this, in Joyce you might see combined
Three worst things, a lawyer, money-lender and steward.

XLI.

His was the triple method to harass by legal plan,
Ruin by note of hand, and serve with the Crown's decree;
One by one in his snare he trapped the poor to a man,
Left them bare in the street, and turned in their doors the key.

XLII.

How many Christian hearts have I seen thus flouted with scorn,
Turned adrift on the world in the prime of life and their pride!
How many lips have I heard curse out the day they were born,
Souls absolved in their anger to die on the bare hill-side!

XLIII.

All for Miss Blake and the law, and Joyce's profit on fees ;
All for Imperial order to see the Queen's writ run ;
All for the honour of England, mistress of half the seas ;
All for English justice, the purest under the sun.

XLIV.

Pitiful God of justice ! You speak of order and law—
Order ! the law of blood which sets the stoat on the track ;
Law ! the order of death which has glutted the soldier's maw,
When Hell lies drunk in a city the morning after a sack.

XLV.

Order and law and justice! All noble things, but defiled,
Made to stink in men's nostrils, a carrion refuse of good,
Till God himself is debased in the work of his hands beguiled,
And good and bad are as one in the mind of the multitude.

XLVI.

All in vain we argue who preach submission to Heaven.
Even to us who know it, such mercy is hard to find.
How then submission to Man by whom no quarter is given?
Vainly and thrice in vain. That nut has too hard a rind.

XLVII.

Then men rise in their anger. Another justice they
seek.
Maxims of right prevail traced down from a pagan
age;
These take the place of the gospel your laws have
robbed from the weak.
Who shall convince them of wrong, or turn the
worm from his rage?

* * * * *

XLVIII.

Which are the first fruits of freedom? Truth,
Courage, Compassion. A man,
Nursed from his childhood in right and guarded
close by the law,
Why should he trifle with virtue or doubt to do
what he can
Fearless in sight of the world, his life without
failure or flaw?

XLIX.

All things come to the strong—power—riches—fair living—repute—
Conscience of worth and of virtue—plain speaking and dealing as plain.
Oh, fair words are easy to speak when the world spreads its pearls at your foot,
Free is humanity's fetter with pleasure gilding the chain.

L.

The Englishman's word, who shall doubt it? The poor Celt, truly, he lies.
Fie on his houghing of cattle, his blunderbuss fired from the hedge!
Witness swears falsely to murder—You throw up your innocent eyes,
Rightly, for murder and lying set honest teeth upon edge.

LI.

Yet, mark how circumstance alters. You plant your Englishman down
Strange on the banks of the Nile or Niger to shift with new life.
All things are stronger than he. He fears men's fanatic frown,
Straightway fawns at their knees, his fingers clutching the knife.

LII.

He is kindly. Yet, think you he spares them, the servant, the cattle, the child,
The wife he has wedded in falsehood, the Prince who clothed him in gold?
Out on such womanly scruples! He boasts the friends he beguiled,
The poisoned wells on his track, the poor beasts starved on the wold.

LIII.

This is necessity's law—Ay, truly. Necessity teaches
Sternly the Devil's truth, and he that hath ears may hear.
Only the grace of God interprets the wrong Hell preaches.
Only the patience of perfect love can cast out fear.

* * * * *

LIV.

Joyce was found on his doorstep, stone dead, one Sunday morning,
Shot by an unknown hand, a charge of slugs in his chest.
The blow had fallen unheard, without either sign or warning,
Save for the notice-to-quit found pinned to the dead man's breast.

* * * * *

LV.

Oh, that terrible morning of grief to angels and
men,
I who knew, none better, the truth that until
that day
Sin in its larger sense was hardly within the ken
Of these poor peasant souls, what dared I devise
or say?

LVI.

A deed of terror? Yes.—A murder? Yes.—A foul
crime?
True, but a signal of battle, the first blood spilt
in a war.
Who could foresee the sequence of wrong to the
end of time?
Who would listen to peace with the red flag
waving afar?

LVII.

War, war, war, was the issue in all men's minds
as they stood
Watching the constable force paraded that after-
noon,
War of the ancient sort when men lay wait in a
wood
Spying the Norman camps low-crouched in a
waning moon.

LVIII.

Group with group they whispered. Their eyes
looked strangely and new,
Lit with the guilty knowledge as thoughts of
the dead would pass.
It was a pitiful sight to mark how the anger grew
In souls that had prayed as children that very
morning at Mass.

* * * * *

LIX.

The answer to Joyce's murder was swift. Two
strokes of the pen,
Set by Miss Blake's fair hand on parchment
white as her face
Gave what remained of the parish, lands, tene-
ments, chapel, and mill,
All to a Scotch stock farmer to hold on a single
lease.

LX.

Here stands the story written. The parchment
itself could show
Hardly more of their death than this great
desolate plain.
The poor potato trenches they dug, how greenly
they grow,
Grass, all grass for ever, the graves of our
women and men !

* * * * *

LXI.

And did all die? You ask it. I ask you in turn,
"what is death?"
Death by disease or battle, with gaping wounds
for a door,
Through it the prisoned soul runs forth with the
prisoned breath,
And what is lost for the one the other gains it
and more.

LXII.

This is the death of the body. Some died thus,
fortunate ones.
Here and there a woman taken in labour of
birth.
Here and there a man struck down on his cold
hearth stones.
Here and there a child, or greybeard bent to
the earth.

LXIII.

Heaven in pity took them. Their innocent souls received
All that the Church can give of help on the onward way;
Here as they lived they died, believing all they believed;
Here their bodies rest, clay kneaded with kindred clay.

LXIV.

Every eviction in Ireland brings one such physical loss,
Weak ones left by the road, grief touching the feeble brain.
None of us mourn such dead who hold the creed of the Cross,
Counting as sure their certain hope of eternal gain.

LXV.

Not for these is my anger. Love grieves, but the
cicatrice closes,
Ending in peace of heart. The dead are doubly
our own.
But what of that other death for which love strews
no roses,
Death of the altered soul, lost, perished forever,
gone ?

LXVI.

Deep in the gulf of your cities they lie, the poor
lorn creatures,
Made in God's image once, his folded innocent
sheep,
Now misused and profaned, in speech and form
and features,
Living like devils and dying like dogs in inces-
tuous sleep.

LXVII.

Seek them where I have found them, in New York,
Liverpool, London,
Cursing and cursed of all, a pustulous human
growth,
These same Irish children God made for his glory,
undone,
Ay, and undoing your law, while black Hell
gapes for you both.

* * * * *

LXVIII.

There. You asked for the truth. You have it
plain from my lips.
Scientists tell us the world has no direction or
plan,
Only a struggle of nature, each beast and nation at
grips,
Still the fittest surviving and he the fittest who
can.

LXIX.

You are that fittest, the lion to-day in your strength.
To-morrow?
Well, who knows what other will come with a wider jaw?
Justly, you say, the nations give place and yield in their sorrow;
Vainly, you say, Christ died in face of the natural law.

LXX.

Would you have me believe it? I tell you, if it were so,
If I were not what I am, a priest instructed in grace,
Knowing the truth of the Gospel and holding firm what I know,
Where should I be at this hour? Nay, surely not in this place.

LXXI.

Granted your creed of destruction, your right of the strong to devour,
Granted your law of Nature that he shall live who can kill,
Find me the law of submission shall stay the weak in his hour,
His single hour of vengeance, or set a rein on his will.

LXXII.

Where should I be, even I? Not surely here with my tears,
Weeping an old man's grief at wrongs which are past regret,
Healing here a little and helping there with my prayers
All for the sake of Nature, to fill the teeth she has whet!

LXXIII.

Not a priest at Aughrim. My place would be
down with those
Poor lost souls of Ireland, who, loving her far
away,
Not too wisely but well, deep down in your docks
lie close,
Waiting the night of ruin which needs must
follow your day.

LXXIV.

England's lion is fat. Full-bellied with fortune he
sleeps;
Why disturb his slumber with ominous news of
ill?
Softly from under his paw the prey he has mangled
creeps,
Deals his blow in the back, and all the carcase
is still.

LXXV.

Logic and counter-logic. You talk of cowardice
rarely!
Dynamite under your ships might make even
your cheek white.
Treacherous! Oh, you are jesting. The natural
law works fairly,
He that has cunning shall live, and he that has
poison bite.

LXXVI.

Only I dare not believe it. I hold the justice of
Heaven
Larger than all the science, and welled from a
purer fount;
God as greater than Nature, his law than the
wonders seven,
Darwin's sermon on Man redeemed by that on
the Mount.

* * * * *

LXXVII.

Thus spoke the Canon of Aughrim, and raised in silence his hands,
Seeming to bless the battle his eyes had seen on the plain.
Order and law, he murmured, a Nation's track in the sands,
Ridge and furrow of grass, the graves of our women and men.

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